



Making all the right moves

Rising star Lissie tells **Ed Power** about singing at Demi Moore's wedding and attracting the attention of her hero David Lynch

SURREAL celebrity encounters are a professional hazard in the pop industry but, even by the usual standards, Elisabeth "Lissie" Maurus has some bizarre stories to share. Oddball director David Lynch has singled her out as the future of music. Without quite intending to, she sang at Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher's wedding. Lenny Kravitz invited her on tour. Lurking by the punch-bowl at a Hollywood shindig at which Madonna, Prince and Lionel Richie were in attendance she found herself striking up a conversation with Red Hot Chili Pepper John Frusciante. Phew — for a delicate songbird she really gets around.

"Although I went to Los Angeles to be, quote unquote, discovered I never moved in that Hollywood world," says the sandy-haired 26-year-old singer. "I lived in this little neighbourhood in the hills and

hung out with this little pocket of musician friends. We played bars and didn't have much money. It was a struggle."

So how did she ended up warbling as Demi and Ashton walked down the aisle? "I met this individual called Guy Oseary who ran [Madonna's boutique label] Maverick Records. He liked my 'raw talent' as it were. Anyway, one day he said he had a gig for me and asked that I learn some love songs. He didn't even tell me where we were going. I showed up and it turned out to be this wedding. Demi and Ashton were very sweet. On the other hand, I have to say the whole thing was totally strange."

Not quite as strange, she acknowledges, as rubbing shoulders with Madge, Prince and Lionel Richie — to say nothing of Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg — at a subsequent get-together.

"I wound up being invited to a few things after that. Everyone was very nice to me. Ultimately, I felt out of place. I was uncomfortable and shy. That's how I ended up talking to John Frusciante at that party. He didn't really know anybody there either. And he was such a normal guy. Very unprepossessing. If you weren't aware of who he was, you would never realised he

was such an important person."

Exerting a rather more direct bearing on her career was her friendship with Lenny Kravitz. Having stumbled upon her at an open mic night in Hollywood, the leather-jacketed rocker invited Lissie to tour the US with him. As shop windows



go, it was a huge opportunity. The only downside, from her perspective, was that she didn't have an album out at the time.

"Maybe it was too soon for me," she sighs. "Of course it helped to get me before big audiences. The thing is, I didn't have a CD to promote. People would come and see you and there would be no follow-through. Don't get me wrong — it was a cool experience. On the other hand, it didn't change my life. As soon as the tour ended I went back to the grindstone of trying to be discovered."

Of all the A-lister run-ins this wispy voiced singer has had, none is more treasured than her encounter with David Lynch, no matter that it mostly took place in cyberspace. It started when the Blue Velvet/Twin Peaks director tweeted that Lissie's debut album *Catching A Tiger* was "head and shoulders above" anything else he'd listened to this year.

"It's not merely that he's a celebrity — he's a really revolutionary artist," she says. "He's this figure in the culture. It is more flattering to hear him say that than it would be to hear another celebrity or

famous person. He's so quirky and cool and what he does is so complex. It is a huge compliment and gives me a lot of credibility."

Sensing an opportunity, Lissie tweeted Lynch back and they arranged to speak on the phone. "I was being cheeky," she laughs. "I wanted to tip-toe around the idea of him directing a video for me. When it came to it though, I couldn't ask him. I thought it would have been a bit rude."

At a time when the music industry is desperately flailing around in search of the next big thing Lissie is something of an anomaly. Signed to Columbia Records, she has been given the time and space to grow at her own pace, with the emphasis as much on cultivating her live fanbase as on shifting units. In the current environment, this strategy of building an audience through word-of-mouth graft feels like a throw-back to a more straightforward age.

"I got lucky, I guess," she says. "I think it's timing. There are other artists out there doing well and showing it's okay to trust musicians to do their own thing. I think maybe that's what is making the labels their money nowadays. It's not always easy. You have to get a lot of people to go along with the plan. So far, though, it's been good."

A dusky confluence of Fleetwood Mac and Carole King, Lissie's music feels like a perfectly preserved artifact from '70s Los Angeles. In fact, she's highly conflicted about LA, moving up-state to a small commuter belt town last year so she could get closer to "the real world".

"I went there to make some progress in my music career," she says. "Once I felt that I had done what I needed to, I started to feel twitchy. I've never been a big city dweller and LA is absolutely huge. So I left. Where I am now, I can have a backyard — a little spot that I call my own."

Raised in Rock Island Illinois, Lissie grew up amid the flat, endless cornfields of the country's agricultural belt.

"If you want a career in music, you really do have to get out," she says. "It's the kind of place where maybe you spend your day at home watching sports on TV or go work in a factory. It's not so much focused on how you feel in terms of your artistic aspirations. In a way, that's a blessing. It gives you stuff to sing about. Coming from Rock Island, I definitely have an interesting perspective on life. It's a double-edged thing: I had to leave to pursue music. And yet, had I not been from there, I wouldn't have the ideas and personality that I do. For sure, it's moulded me as a person."

■ Catching A Tiger is out now. Lissie performs on Other Voices which is screened later this month.

"Coming from Rock Island, I definitely have an interesting perspective on life. It's a double edge thing: I had to leave to pursue music. And yet, had I not been from there, I wouldn't have the ideas and personality that I do. For sure, it's moulded me as a person"



GIRL POWER: Above and opposite, Elisabeth "Lissie" Maurus has been given the time and space to grow at her own pace, with the emphasis on cultivating her live fanbase.